



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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October 30, 2008
FB08-061

Gulf of Mexico Commercial Grouper/Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota Program Referendum

NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule informing the public of the procedures, schedule, and eligibility requirements that NOAA Fisheries Service will use in conducting a referendum for the Gulf of Mexico commercial grouper/tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. The rule becomes effective December 1, 2008.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) has requested NOAA Fisheries Service hold a referendum for an IFQ program for the Gulf of Mexico commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries. The referendum is being conducted to determine if commercial grouper and tilefish fishers approve of the Grouper/Tilefish IFQ program developed by the Council and NOAA Fisheries Service. IFQ program components are evaluated in Amendment 29 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and include, but are not limited to: Initial eligibility, transferability, ownership caps, appeals, a cost recovery plan, and enforcement measures. Amendment 29 can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> or <http://gulfcouncil.org>.

Voter Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to vote in the IFQ referendum, an individual must possess an active or renewable commercial reef fish permit with combined average annual grouper and tilefish landings of at least 8,000 pounds during 1999-2004 (with the allowance of dropping one year). These individuals are considered to have substantially fished the commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries.

Referendum Procedures

NOAA Fisheries Service will calculate combined average annual grouper and tilefish landings for each currently active or renewable permit using the highest five years from 1999-2004. Those individuals holding a permit with an average of at least 8,000 pounds will be designated as eligible voters. On or about December 1, 2008, NOAA Fisheries Service will mail eligible voters a ballot for each permit held. Individuals holding permits that do not have an average of at least 8,000 pounds will not receive a ballot. Individuals will have 30 days from the postmark date to complete their ballots and mail them to NOAA Fisheries Service. Referendum ballots not received within 30 days of the postmarked date will not be considered. NOAA Fisheries Service will conduct the vote counting within 60 days of receiving the ballots. Approval or disapproval of the referendum will be determined by a majority of the votes cast.

Copies of the final rule are available by contacting NOAA Fisheries Service's Southeast Regional Office at 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701. The final rule can be obtained in electronic form from the *Federal Register* Web site: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> (use advanced search for final rules using "AW85" as a keyword).

This bulletin provides only a summary of the information pertinent to the rule. Any discrepancies between this bulletin and the rule as published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

How Can We Improve These Fishery Bulletins?

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve future fishery bulletins, please contact:

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If you would like to receive these fishery bulletins via e-mail as soon as they are published, please e-mail: SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov and include: (1) "Request for Electronic Fishery Bulletins" in the subject line and (2) your preferred e-mail address in the body of the e-mail.

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FB08-061